

## Faith and Practice Revision Committee

### Visit to Valley Friends Meeting

March 24, 2013

Sheila Bach presented for Faith and Practice Revision Committee. Notes were taken by Riley Robinson. Approximately eight Valley Friends were present. There had been some confusion about scheduling, and other Friends had been present the week before for the presumed date.

***• Understanding that our faith is too deep for words, does the Faith & Practice adequately articulate our Quaker beliefs and testimonies, in order both to inform those new to Friends and to inspire and challenge those with long experience of Friends?***

A Friend expressed appreciation for the 10 years of work and for the sizable scope of the job of updating Faith and Practice.

Appreciation was expressed for the queries and advices as being good for both people new to Friends and for longtime Friends.

A Friend noted that at Friends Meetings we all come from very different backgrounds. Simplicity looks different depending on where you come from. This is an example of how material in Faith and Practice can help each one of us consider what Quaker values can mean in our lives.

One Friend had compared this draft of Faith and Practice to the 1988 version, and as well to an FGC discipline from the 1920s, other disciplines, and the Penn discipline, which included a segment on "Taciturnity." The Friend said that we could do better with the Life of the Spirit section and referred to it as "highfalutin and intellectual." This Friend asked why so many words were used to describe wordlessness, saying that there was not a lot of meaning there and that psychospiritual jargon doesn't compare with practice.

The Friend allowed that the Life of the Spirit section may be trying to say, "what is this religion about?" The Friend suggested that for Quakers who stick around a while, it's about being gathered by Spirit or Light and by being called to work out the rest of it.

Some Quaker distinctives are discussed, but this Friend offered that perhaps, rather than a discussion of abstract ideas about the spiritual journey, it would be more valuable to ask how do you cope with being silent for an hour in order to help those new to Quakerism. It would also be helpful to think what has already been written about what happens for Friends during worship, as has been written by Howard Brinton and others. Some people examine their conscience, some people pray, some follow their breathing, etc.

A Friend thought that the Life of the Spirit section was good. The passage on life experience was bold and exciting and referred to a section that referred to passion and speaking truth. The section seems to invite community.

A Friend wondered if there could be a more full expression of the life of Jesus as it relates to modern Friends

A Friend appreciated Elise Boulding's quote on page 22, which spoke eloquently.

**• Does the Faith & Practice provide sufficient resources, such as queries and advices, to assist us in accountability one to another in our Monthly Meetings and as a Yearly Meeting?**

A Friend said that it would be helpful to share some of our own interpretations of how useful these queries can be, wondering how other Meetings use this Faith and Practice. Sheila answered that after visiting Monthly Meetings, it appears that some hardly read it at all, some read it and mark it up and discuss it. There are some very different uses for the book in terms of contemplation, Quaker education, and as a guide to practice.

One Friend said that the Resources section is abundantly sufficient, perhaps too much. However wording about gambling seems to be missing. Sheila responded that the committee has now put something in about gambling.

A Friend likes the queries because they say how. They can call forth our thoughts about how these issues show up in our lives.

One Friend liked the fact the divergent questions elicit better responses than simple "yes or no" questions.

A Friend was appreciative of having the queries, advices, and voices in one topic area. The Friend also appreciated the readings at the back of the book.

One Friend said that now that there are 17 queries, it is not so easy to do one a month in harmony with the year. Sheila said that some people like the new queries and some do not. Some Meetings pick and choose readings according to what the major issues are at Meeting for Business that month.

A Friend asked what the recent changes have been since the 2012 draft. Sheila said that they have worked on the queries, which have attracted a wide range of feedback. The committee has mixed some of the 1988 queries back in. In the index, there are more entries and more cross indexing.

One Friend noted a paragraph at the bottom of page 43 that deals with drug use and said that it goes into much more detail than some other topics, fearing that this invites confrontation. This could be because the book uses the concept of SPICES to frame the

presentation of testimonies. He notes that this concept is popular right now, but that Quaker testimonies and concerns have been with us for a long time and not always bundled this way. It seems that because of the headings used for SPICES, the section on drugs didn't quite fit in, and suggested that reorganization might help. Sheila said that the committee has changed the heading from "Fixing the World" to "Evolving testimonies," which Friends present felt was much better.

A Friend said that the paragraph doesn't allow for being a support person for people struggling with addiction.

One Friend said that in the old Faith and Practice, the Life of the Spirit is partly testimonies and partly processes such as marriage. Now the areas are separated. Perhaps it would be better if these areas were again connected.

A Friend appreciated the organization of the book.

A Friend noted that in some publications she seen, instead of "do this and don't do that," the thrust is to care for our bodies in a way that contributes to health. Sometimes concepts like cleansing and purity are used to help connect people with the Divine, or the body as a temple.

A Friend said lately obesity is a problem, and that if we were to write about the body as a temple perhaps this could be an important topic to add.

**• *Does the Faith & Practice provide sufficient explanation and guidance for our Quaker process?***

A Friend likes the introduction.

A Friend said that the term "Monthly Meeting" can be confusing to newcomers. They don't always realize that Monthly Meetings meet weekly, for instance. On page 131, which begins "Monthly Meetings consist of..." It might be better to say that Monthly Meetings are typically meeting weekly or emphasize that there is a weekly meeting in some way and to describe the Monthly Meeting as a worshipping body and one's central faith community. It was also suggested that Monthly Meeting for Business be described as the body through which we in the Monthly Meeting can act together.

The term "Friends Meeting" may be more accessible than "Monthly Meeting" to strangers, and even the term "meeting" may need explanation, since it gets used so often for different things.

One Friend said that all of us are together in this room without having been given all the explanations, so some learning must take place as we go along. The queries work well, but there are a large number of quotes, the volume of which might create an

organizational burden. As we try and maintain the document in the future, we need to think about how much effort is required to maintain it.

A Friend spoke of documents in the electronic age that can be easily modified and commented upon.

Another Friend said, however, that while Faith and Practice is supposed to represent continuing revelation, it still needs to be a book that has a date and represents where we are at a certain time based on some focused consideration.

A friend added that we are people in the here and now and we need guidance.

***• Does Faith & Practice provide guidance and structure while inviting the work of the Spirit and continuing revelation?***

A Friend said that this edition is strong in expressing the sense of ongoing and developing understanding and revelation and that invites questions. “It invites me to apply the light that I have.”

A Friend referred to page 149-150 and regretted that Valley Meeting does not do better at preserving records. Riley offered to discuss records retention later.

A Friend expressed appreciation for the queries that had been used for this exercise today.